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TEGNÉR'S POETIC TREATMENT OF DEATH

INTRODUCTION

The conception of death in its relation to the individual soul is an essential part of all religion. Since Esaias Tegnér was primarily a religious poet, it is not surprising that he dwelt with deep interest upon the subject of death and that too, not only in his elegies but also in nearly all his didactic and philosophical poetry. According to the character of his poetic technique¹ (viz., the use of vivid contrasts in thought and color) Tegnér was prone to contrast death with some phase of life, either physical or spiritual and by this method of contrast to reveal the relation of the two states of existence to each other and the final harmony of both in the great chain of existence. Altho he was often wont to express his conception of death in orthodox or conventional terms, his fundamental idea regarding death was in keeping with that of the Romantic School of Philosophy, viz., that death is not a negation of life but a supplement of life, preserving the moral integrity of the universe and constituting an indispensable part of that completed circle of existence for which man was created. Tegnér's poetic exposition of death reveals his sympathies with the prevailing Pantheistic and Neo-platonic doctrines of his time and like all Romantic poets he drew largely upon nature for his symbols and metaphors. It is the purpose of this article to point out in Tegnér's poetic treatment of death these characteristic features of his poetic art.

a. Death a survival of the divine essence

One recurrent thought regarding death, characteristic of Tegnér, is that the essential cannot perish; the divine essence survives, even tho its manifestations are in a constant state of change.

¹ Regarding Tegnér's poetic technique, cf. G. Ljunggren, "Esaias Tegnér's bildspråk," *Smärre Skrifter*, Lund, 1879; Francis Bull, "Tegnér og Wergeland," *Til Gerhard Gran*, pp. 128 ff., Kristiania, 1916.

Thus, he says in *Fridsröster* (1808):

Hvad tillfälligt är må falla,
det väsentliga består.

in *De tre bröderna* (1817):

Stoftets former äro många,
det gudomliga är ett.

in *Svanen och fjälltrasten* (1812):

Konstens former äro många,
fast dess väsende är ett.

in *Vid förrättandet af en prestvigning* (1837):

Formen må skifta och växla alltjämt, men väsendet blifver.

in the canto *Försoningen* of the *Frithiofssaga* (1825):

En är Allfader, fastän fler hans sändebud.

and in *Skaldebref* (1815):

Kroppen förvittras till luft, men sinnet är evigt det samma.

The divine attributes of the human soul, the eternal verities, survive the form of their manifestation, as he says, for instance, in *Skaldebref*:

Sanning och snille och dygd lefva bland skuggorna kvar.

or in his elegy to *C. A. Tiliander* (1806):

Och hvad godt, hvad ädelt vi den lemne,
vädren ej förströ.
Evigst lefver, som en gud, dess ämne,
fast dess former dö.

In other words, the *symbol* perishes but the *thing* itself, the divine essence, lives:—"tecknet är ej saken."² Therefore, the human

² Tegnér's favorite expression for distinguishing the essence from its outward form, cf. *Frithiofssaga*, *Nattwardsbarnen*, *Epilog* (of 1820).

soul, which is divine,³ cannot perish. The sense of the soul's divinity is a spiritual instinct with which man is endowed and this instinct was with all the Romantic poets the only sure guide to spiritual truth. Thus, Tegnér says in *Lifvet*:

Men i hjertat ropade hvar dag
så en röst: "I tingens stora *kedja*⁴
hvarje länk skall lefva, skall sig glädja
åt sitt lif, sin varelse, som jag."

and in *Till en far* (1805):

Se, i Ödets taflor skuren
Står en lag som evigt stått:
Intet dör uti Naturen;
Lifvet byter former blott.

b. The human soul as a part of the divine essence in nature

Tegnér's love of nature is reflected in the many parallels he draws between nature and man. Just as the vital principle of nature is never destroyed but, in spite of decay, continues to assert itself in some other form, so the human soul survives the dissolution of the body, whether the soul preserve its individual

³ Cf. *Fridsruiter*, *Nattvardsbarnen*, and *Försoningen* of the *Frithiofssaga*.

⁴ Cf. *Förvillelsen* (1804):

Helgd vare ryktet tänkarn har!
Hans forskning villorna förtränger.
Vi se den *länk* för *länk*,—men hvar
är fästet, hvarvid *kedjan* hänger?

and *Religionen* (1801), where exactly the same metaphor occurs:

och att du själf *den kedjan* gjorde,
som *länk* för *länk* du vandrar vid.

This metaphor (i.e., "life as the great chain") was no doubt taken from Leopold (*Försynen*) who in turn appropriated it from Pope (*Essay on Man*), cf. *Epist.* I v. 33 f.:

Is the *great chain*, that draws all to agree,
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee?

Cf. Albert Nilsson's *Introduction* to Tegnér's *Filosofiska och estetiska studier*, Stockholm, 1913, p. 42, footnote.

identity or not. Thus, the poet says in his elegy *Till en sörjande make* (1810):

Utur vinterns graf föds våren,
lifvet föds ur människans.

Nature and spirit are one; both share in the divine essence. Thus in nature we worship God, as the poet says in *Träden* (1813):

Fall ned och tillbed, icke ett skapat ting,
men håg som lefver!

Every human being in the hour of spiritual exaltation senses this divinity within himself and his kinship with the divine essence in nature, as the poet says of himself in *Lifvet*:

Och du eld, som mig din värma ger,
och du våg, som i min bägar blandas,
och du luft, uti hvars famn jag andas,
ja, som syskon vill jag älska er.

and in *Träden*:

O, låt mig trycka hvarst väsen till kärligt bröst!

Thus, Frithiof, when love had swept all hatred from his heart, felt himself in tune with the Infinite and therefore seemed to hear the heart-beat of nature (*Försoningen*):

Det var, som kände han *naturens hjerta slå*⁵
emot sitt hjerta.

This divine harmony with nature is the manifestation of God in the human soul and a proof of its kinship with God and, therefore, a most potent manifestation of the immortality of the soul. This was a cardinal dogma of the nature-loving

⁵ Cf. *Axel*:

Det var som om naturen sade,
att nu sin herdestund hon hade,
så lifligt och så tyst ändå,
du kunde hört dess *hjerta slå*.

Romanticists and in keeping with their doctrine of Pantheism which had profoundly affected Tegnér's religious thought.⁶ Tho opposed to the principle that the human soul is destined to lose its identity in the spiritual essence of the universe, Tegnér, nevertheless, sympathized with the Pantheists insofar as they believed that the spiritual essence manifested outwardly in nature corresponds within to the human soul. Thus, for instance, in his poem *Panteismen* Tegnér portrays the beauty of nature as a proof of the divinity of the human soul:

Låt oss gå ner i dalar,
der trasten slår i björkens äreport,
ros rodnar för sin längtan, bäcken talar
om Gud, som lefver, och allt skönt, han gjort!

c. Death preserves the integrity of the spiritual law

Since death does not, according to the poet, destroy the individual integrity of the human soul, he is often forced to depart from his analogy with nature, inasmuch as the individual manifestations of nature are in a state of constant change and decay. In nature there is no sense of justice; Death mows down indiscriminately the flower and the weed. Thus, in lamenting the death of *J. Beckfriis* (1822) Tegnér says:

En tröstlös lära går igenom menskans öden,
som genom merg och ben en feberrysning går;
det usla frodar sig, det härliga förgår,
och lian svänges blindt af *vensterhändla* döden.⁷

⁶ Cf. *Introduction* to Tegnér's "Filosofiska och estetiska skrifter," by Albert Nilsson, Stockholm, 1913, ch. V. *Naturuppfattning*.

⁷ Cf. *Resignationen* (1808):

Frid i ert eget bröst, frid, dödlige, med tiden!
Hur flitigt ock hans *lia* går
fram öfver eder skörd, så hoppens dock och liden.

and *Den vise* (1804):

Skörden utaf solar och af jordar
*mej*as mogen af hans *lia* ner.

The metaphor of Time (Death) as an old man, armed with a scythe, is a traditional Christian conception.

But the human soul, as a part of the divine order of things, has no necessary connection with material or natural life. The body, like all things mortal, perishes, but the soul takes its flight unto God, as Tegnér says in this same elegy:

och anden lade glad ifrån sig stoftets börda
och ur det låga grus flög, som en bön, till Gud.

The fate of the human soul is thus after all determined not by blind chance (and thus lost in the chaos of the mechanical forces of the universe), but by the guiding hand of an intelligent and loving spirit, as the poet says in his elegy to *E. Rosenblad* (1806):

Broder! denna helsning öfver stjernor,
detta handslag i de dödas land!
Låt oss tro, att *ödet*s blinda tårnor
ledas likväl af en faders hand.

We shall not be lost in the chaos of nature's night, but shall survive all change and decay in the cosmos of the spiritual world of which we are a part. Thus, the poet says in *Den vise* (1804):

Allt är rof utaf förgängligheten,
tomt står rummet, der naturen var;
menskan blott är än den samma qvar,
hennes tanke fyller evigheten.
Uti kaos' natt ej lif, ej ljud,
intet, intet utom hon och Gud.

That we are a part of the divine Spirit and that death serves only as a step upward towards the Infinite, Tegnér expresses most beautifully in his conception of Heaven as a spiritual state in which we share even in this life, whenever the soul apprehends the divine (either in itself or in nature). Thus, he says in his elegy to *K. L. Beckfriis* (1834):

Vi flytta deras luftiga gestalt
till himlen,—är ej himlen öfverallt?
I sen dem icke, men I dem förmimmen
i middagsglansen som i midnattstimmen,
så snart ett högre, ett odödligt hopp

uti förvissnadt hjerta blomma opp,
 så snart en ädel tanke lyfter vingen,
 en bättre känsla söker stjärneringen;
 ty allt hvad lifvet stort och heligt har
 från andeverlden kommer till en hvar.

Earth life is thus a part of the future and eternal life of man; the two states of existence are divine and, therefore, in reality constitute but one harmonized and continuous life. Thus, Tegnér says in *Försoningen* (*Frithiofs saga*):

Så är de höge Asars lif en förebild
 till mensklighetens lägre: bäge äro blott
 Allfaders stilla tankar, de förändras ej.

This faith in the divinity of the human soul and in the divine nature of its existence in the body as well as after death was in keeping with the doctrine of the Romantic philosophers, who laid special stress upon the immanent God. The change in death is purely physical, not spiritual. Viewed from the standpoint of its religious or moral aspects, life serves as a preparation for this change and is merely the pathway⁸ leading up to the Eternal. The human soul does not after death lose its identity but only continues its normal and natural development; thus the integrity of the spiritual law regarding justice and morality is preserved.

⁸ In *Förvillelsen*, for instance, the poet compares earth life to "the portico in the temple of eternity":

Och var vårt lif bestämdt till mer
 än till portiken för ditt tempel?

which is exactly the same thought as that expressed by the priest of Balder in *Försoningen*:

Ty jorden är dock himlens skugga, lifvet är
 förgården dock till Balderstemplet ofvan skyn.

In *Mjeltsjukan* (1825) earth life is similarly compared to that school wherein "the foundling of time" receives instruction for the eternal life:

och tidens hittebarn, här satt i skolen,
 får kanske se sin fader—bortom solen.

This sentiment is also reflected in his elegy to C. A. Tiliander (1806):

Nej, hvad lifvet börjat i sin skola
 bildar grafven ut.

d. Death as the complement to life

One great outstanding fact regarding death is, according to the poet, that it affords a release from the sorrows and disappointments of life, even if the promised reward for a noble life be not realized. Life's pleasures and ambitions are delusions from which the grave offers certain escape, as the poet says in his elegy to *N. F. Sparrsköld* (1809):

tro mig, lifvets glädje dårar;⁹
endast grafven håller ord.

and to *Sven Hylander* (1825):

Gläd dig, yngling i din himmel! Ack, all jordens glädje är
som en hektisk rodnad, för minuten
öfver lifvets bleka kinder gjuten:
gläd dig bättre der!

Life at best is always unsatisfactory and incomplete;¹⁰ only death, therefore, can fulfill the broken aspirations of

⁹ Cf. his elegy to *fru Stoltz* (1814):

Säg dem, *lifvets glädje* dårar,
men att dygden evig är.

¹⁰ Characteristic of the Romantic poets, Tegnér has most frequently chosen the flower as a symbol for this idea. The flower perishes in all its beauty; even so does human life. Thus, the poet says in his elegy to *Den drunknade gossen* (1818):

Durföre bröt han i hast en förgängelig blomma och lade
henne, *en vänlig symbol*, hän på din tidiga graf.

and in *Till en yngling* (1810):

Bryt blomman, o yngling; i morgon skall den
på grafven strös.

Thus, a young life cut short by death, is "a lily plucked too soon"; cf. "en lilja bruten i förtid" (*Nattvardsbarnen*), "du hvita lilja uti förtid bruten" (*Till friherrinnan Martina v. Schwerin*). For the dead poet *David Aspelin* (1821) Tegnér, however, uses the appropriate symbol of "the broken lyre":

Lik *en splittrad lyra*
du ligger der, och himlens melodier
ha slumrat in uti de brustna strängar.

and for *Nils Trolle* (1827) the symbol of "the artist's torso":

Men nu är din lefnad lik den store
konstnärns torso, kraftig, skön som den,
ack, men stympad!

humanity. The insufficiency of human life and its transitory character Tegnér emphasizes repeatedly, as, for instance, in *Försoningen* (*Frithiofssaga*):

Ack, allt det bästa ligger på hinsidan om
grafhögen, Gimles gröna port, och lågt är allt,
besmittadt allt, som dväljes under stjernorna.

or in his elegy to *Elof Tegnér* (1815):

För lågt, för lågt hvar enda dödlig bygger,
som bygger *under stjernorna ännu.*

But death fills out this broken circle of existence, as the poet says in *Ynglingens sotsäng* (1805):

lifvet äger ej ett högre hopp än döden.

and in his elegy to *C. A. Tiliander* (cf. footnote 8):

Nej, hvad lifvet börjat i sin skola
bildar grafven ut.

Death delivers up the soul free from material dross, even as fire renders asbestos more beautiful and pure (*Elden*, 1812):

herbergera du den vilsna gästen
och gör honom, som du gör asbesten
mera skön och ren!

Best of all, death unites the soul with those gone before, as the poet says, for instance, in his elegy to *L. P. Munthe* (1807):

Säkert minnets turturdufva
flyger öfver grafvens rand,
döden löser ej de ljufva
sammanstämda själers band.

in *Till en aflägsen älskarinna* (1804):

Välkommen efter mig, Anna!
Döden löser ej våra band.

and in his elegy to *Anna B. Leijonhufvud* (1835):

Dock samlas en gång , som vi gerna höre,
de många vänner der, som vandrat före,
och därför blicka vi med fromt begär
till himlen opp: o, den som vore der!

Death is the Brother of Love, the merciful Liberator who removes us from life's trials and brings us face to face with the divine Being. Thus, the poet says in *Nattvardsbarnen*:

Döden är kärlekens bror, är dess tvillingbroder, allenast
mera allvarlig att se:
* * * * *
Död är befrielse¹¹ blott, är förbarmendet stumt; vid hans hjerta
lättare andas mitt svalkade bröst, och anlet mot anlet¹²
skådar jag Gud som han är.

And in *Mjeltsjukan* (cf. footnote 8) he says:

och tidens hittebarn, här satt i skolen,
får kanske se sin fader—bortom solen.

Death reveals the secret of life and thus bridges over the great gulf between humanity and the unknown. Thus, in *Till friherrinnan M. v. Schwerin* Tegnér says:

och *gåtan*, som vi fåfängt gisse här,
det tros att ordet dertill finnes der.

and in the *Epilog* of 1843 (*vid Vexjö gymnasii jubelfest*):

derföre ödmjuk var och hoppas med bäfvan, tills döden
öppnar sin skola och tyst förklarar dig *gåtan af lifvet*.

This "riddle of life" (*gåtan af lifvet*), which shall be revealed to us when the veil between Heaven and Earth shall have been

¹¹ Cf. his elegy to *C. G. Leopold*:

Då kom der tyst, kom oförtänt *befriarn*,
den stille guden, nattens äldste son.

¹² Cf. St. Paul, I *Cor.* 13, 12: "For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then *face to face*."

torn aside, is "reconciliation," and "reconciliation is *love*," as the poet says in *Nattvardsbarnen*:

Se, då remnar med hast förlåten i templet, som skilde
jorden och himmelen åt, och de döde stiga ur grafven,
hviskande sakta hvarann i örat med bleknade läppar
ordet, blott anadt förut, till *skapelsens gåta: försoning!*
Kärlekens djup är försoningens djup, försoning är kärlek.

Since the spirit life must represent a higher state of love and reconciliation with God, the poet in *Försoningen* (*Frithiofs saga*) depicts Death as the great Reconciler; reconciliation for the human soul means the return to that original state of purity and love which was native to the soul at birth:

På jorden går försonarn kring och heter död,
All tid är från sin början grumlad evighet,
Allt jordiskt lif är affall från Allfaders tron,
försonas är att vända renad dit igen.¹³

¹³ Cf. the fragment *Mennisko-anden*. Here the poet conceives the soul before birth as dwelling in Heaven:

Kanske flöto dina barndoms-stunder
sakta fram ibland dess* lunder,
som en bäck bland Edens trän?—
Kanske flyktade din ungdoms fröjder
på dess* solbeglänsa höjder,
som en dagg bländ rosor hän?

*Dess refers here to Heaven (*det blåa landet*.)

Thus, the soul at death flies back again into Heaven, as the poet says in his elegy to *Helena C. Åkerhjelm* (1828):

tills en gång, när dagen grydde,
hon såg ömt uppå sin vän,
lyfte vingarna och flydde
till de himmelska igen.

or in his elegy to *C. A. Tiliander* (1806):

Du, den ädlaste deri, den bäste,
som oss älskat än,
hof ditt öga opp till stjernströdt fäste
och for hem igen.

The affinity of this thought with Neo-platonic conceptions is self-evident. The doctrine of pre-existence is most clearly brought out in *Elden* (1820):

Himlalåga! när den trötte anden
en gång flyger till de blåa landen
der hon kanske bött för länge se'n.

So Frithiof (*Frithiofs lycka*) longs for death in order that his love which is divine may find its true home in Heaven, removed from the contaminating influences of earth life:

Till himlen mera än till jorden
min kärlek hör, försmå ej den!
I himlen är han ammad vorden
och längtar till sitt hem igen.
O, den som re'n der uppe vore!

Death completes, then, man's spiritual existence and bestows upon him finally that perfect state of happiness for which he was destined. As a spiritual creature, he is a part of God and is thus destined to share in the eternal life of God, which death alone can fully reveal to him.

e. The poet's method of contrasting life and death

In nearly all his elegies Tegnér portrays the great contrast between the physical and spiritual aspects of death, between the hopeless and gruesome features of the grave and the happy and beautiful existence of the new-born spirit. This method of contrast enhances the effect which the poet wishes to produce, viz., the ideal life which the spirit realizes in death.

One of the most heart-rending aspects of death is the absolute silence of the grave, the insensibility of nature to the grief of the mourner. Thus, in his elegy to *E. Rosenblad* (1806), the poet says:

Ack! när solen utur böljan stiger,
när hon rinner uti böljan ner,
ropar du hans namn. Men grafven tiger,
*eko*¹⁴ svarar dig—och ingen mer.

even as Frithiof (*Frithiof på sin faders hög*) calls out in anguish to his dead father, but receives no answer from the silent grave:

"Ej svar, ej tecken för din son i nöden
du eger, fader! O, hur arm är döden!"

¹⁴ Cf. *Lifvel*:

Står jag ensam i en vidsträckt graf,
der min suck blott *ekos gensvar* väcker?

In his poem *Vid invigningen af Gårdsby kyrka* (1837) Tegnér depicts the grave in all its gruesome aspects, but the most overwhelming and awe-inspiring of these is its eternal silence:

Känner I det stället,
den stilla staden, der de tyste bo?
* * * * *
Ej sorl,
ej kif hörs der, en hvar är der belåten
och tvistar ej med andra om sin plats.

But just as in most of his elegies, the poet suddenly resorts to an abrupt contrast between the physical and spiritual aspects of death, which convinces the reader of the victory of the spirit over the flesh and effects a heightened sense of the happiness and loveliness of the future life:

Men rysen icke! ty de multna benen
få lif igen och undanvälta stenen,
och himlalöften och odödligt hopp¹⁵
gå som en morgon öfver grafven opp.
Hvad kärt, hvad dyrbart I på jorden haden
det mognar der, som frukten under bladen,
och står en gång ifrån förmultnad stam
föryngradt, skönare och luftigare fram.

This method of contrast is so frequently employed by the poet¹⁶ that it would be a useless task to trace its application

¹⁵ The "immortal hope" (*odödligt hopp*), as symbolical of the spirit arising from the grave at death, was a favorite metaphor with Tegnér; cf., for instance, his elegy to *fru M. Meck* (1842):

Men när du lagt neder vandringsstafven,
se, då flyger utur grafven
ett odödligt hopp
präktigt mot sin himmel opp.

Cf. also a similar use of this phrase in his elegy to *K. L. Beckfriis*:

så snart ett högre, *ett odödligt hopp*
uti forvissnadht hjerta blommer opp.

¹⁶ Cf. Tegnér's own words in *Till Leopold*, introduction to *Axel*:

Som blomstren skifta i det gröna,
så skiftar diktens lätta här.

in all the poems in which it occurs. I have, therefore, confined myself to a quotation from the above poem as a fitting illustration of this artistic device peculiar to Tegnér.

f. The poet's conception of the dead

But the gruesome aspects of the grave are not always uppermost in the poet's mind. Being himself disappointed and at times weary of life, it is not surprising that Tegnér depicts the grave as a haven of blissful rest for the weary wanderer in life's journey; over him the cares and trials of life pass unheard and unheeded. Thus, the poet says in his elegy to *Frans Suell* (1817):

Lycklig du, som hvilat derinunder,
innan landets sorgespel spelts ut.

and to *Nils Trolle* (1827):

Sof i ro! ty det är orons stunder,
endast orons, som på jorden bo,
hvilans stunder börjar först *inunder*.
Sof i ro!

and to *friherrinnan M. v. Schwerin* (1839):

Hur mångt år, som ingen än hört af,
går med sin oro öfver jungfruns graf!
Lycksalig du, som i dess natt förbiser,
nej, sofver bort århundradens sottiser!

But in reality the grave, like the dreams of the living, is a delusion, for the soul of the dead has already taken its flight up to Heaven. Thus, in his elegy to *Vilhelmina U. Cedercrantz* (1814) the poet says:

Vårens stigande sol skall amma en blomma på grafven,
vingade sångarn' skall slå klagande toner derkring.
Men *du sväfvat* i glans *deröfver* och ännu som fordom,
tyst som den nattliga dagg, gjuter välsignelse ner.

That the human soul arises from the body at death, like some ethereal substance which seeks the pure and radiant

atmosphere of the heavens, was a traditional Christian conception.¹⁷ Thus, Tegnér often depicts the dead as a sort of ethereal being, hovering above Earth and looking down with physical sight upon the living, as, for instance, in his elegy to *J. Beckfriis*:

Som stjernorna se ner, se neder derifrån,
gjut af din salighet en fläkt uti hans hjerta.

and to *J. Kröger* (1818):

Bor du der som stjernor skina,
glöm ej jordens sorg likväl;
blicka neder till de dina
och gjut tröst i deras själ!

The traditional conception of Heaven, as a state corresponding to our physical life in a refined and idealized form, often finds expression in Tegnér's poetry.¹⁸ In keeping with this conception, the spiritual body is also idealized as a beautiful and perfect counterpart of the physical body. Thus, the poet says in his elegy *Till en sörjande fader* (1827):

Der är honom godt att vara: i en evig morgonvind
lättare hans hjerta klappar, rosigare är hans kind.

The spiritual body is, moreover, often adorned with those heavenly attributes which the conventional idea of Heaven has bestowed upon it, as in the elegy to *Samuel Heurlin* (1835):

Och en gestalt, lik doft ur blomsterskålar,
så skön, nej skönare än hon var här,
dig möter der uti en dräkt af strålar.

The dead are the living "transfigured" by the holy light of

¹⁷ Cf. St. Paul's doctrine of the Resurrection, I *Cor.* 15, 44; "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

¹⁸ Cf., for instance, *Nattvardsbarnen*, and his elegy to *Helena C. Åkerhjelm* (1828).

Heaven. Thus, Maria in *Axel* (1822) depicts herself after death as "a spirit transfigured upon the far strand":

då är jag död, då sitter *anden*
förklarad på den fjärran stranden
 och beder godt för dig, och ser
 med alla himlens ögon ner.

Since the dead are thus conceived as dwelling in the heavens above and as sharing with the living the physical senses, Tegnér frequently identifies the departed spirit with some appropriate manifestation of nature. None but a Romantic poet would seek to comfort the bereaved by appealing to this instinct which unites the human soul with the spirit of nature and thus attempts to identify with nature the soul of the deceased. The symbol of the star in the heavens, as the eye of the deceased spirit looking down upon earth in the peace of night, or the symbol of the gentle breezes, as the sigh of the departed in answer to the bereaved, is a thoroly Romantic conception and especially peculiar to Tegnér. Thus, in his elegy to *fru Stoltz*¹⁹ (1814) Tegnér says:

När en *stjerna* från det *höga*
 blickar ned *i nattens fred*,
 tänk dig, att det är hans *öga*,
 som till dig ännu ser ned!

¹⁹ Cf. his elegy *Till en sörjande make* (1810):

Sörjer du, att detta *öga*
 en gång utan tårar ser
 från det obekanta *höga*
 som en *morgonstjerna* ner;
 * * * * *
 att du mången gång skall höra
 hennes ande stiga ned,
 hviska tröst uti ditt öra
i den helga nattens fred.

The "peace of night" (*nattens fred*) was a favorite expression with Tegnér; "Qvällen är med friden slägt," he says in *Fridsröster*. Cf. also *Afskedet* (*Frithiofs-saga*):

Blott då och då, när uti *nattens frid*
 du mönstrar än en gång förfutna dagar.

När de lätta vindar fara
och hvar suck ifrån ditt bröst
återsuckande besvara,
tänk dig, att det är hans röst!

Consonant with this conception Tegnér depicts the dead, tho invisible, as present with us even in this life. They hover around about us and are our guardian angels, guiding us on the path to Heaven, as he says in his elegy to *K. L. Beckfriis*:

Tro mig! de döde äro icke fjärran,—
de sväfvä kring oss som en fläkt från Herran
och vagga fram oss, mellan böljors krig,
till lifvets stilla ankarplats,—till sig.

To the conception of the dead as ghosts²⁰ (who rise from the grave at night, etc.), so popular in folk-lore, Tegnér occasionally resorted, especially during periods of great depression. Nevertheless, the morbid and uncanny aspects of the dead were peculiarly attractive to Tegnér and like all Romantic poets he drew upon the imaginative element of folk-lore to enhance the vividness of his poetic conception.

This conception of the dead as "shades," whose life is a counterpart of our physical existence, was also characteristic of classical mythology, and it is, therefore, not surprising that Tegnér, whose artistic sense was so deeply affected by classical ideals, should have occasionally resorted²¹ to classical figures in depicting death.

²⁰ This conception was no doubt enhanced by the influence of Bürger and Ossian, the best examples of which may be seen in the elegy to *Elof Tegnér* (1815) and to *K. L. Beckfriis* (1834). The pessimistic and morbid aspects of Tegnér's poetry have in part been treated in my article "Pessimism in Tegnér's Poetry," *Pub. of the Soc. for the Advancement of Scan. Study*, Vol. III, p. 127, 1916.

²¹ Cf. for instance, *Resignationen* (1808):

Och hopp, tag du min hand, och led mig och förljufva
min vandring utmed *Stygens strand!*
Hur hjertligt skall jag der hvar fiende förlåta,
hur jag skall söka opp bland *skuggorna* en vän.

But, however Tegnér may have in his poetic imagination conceived the dead, the future life signified to him a great spiritual revelation. The symbol for this revelation is "light"; thus the poet says, for instance, in his elegy to *C. G. af Leopold* (1829):

Hur klart är nu, hur ljust i fadershuset!
Farväl, du ljusets vän, och fröjda dig i ljuset!

and again:

"Hvad bor i mörkret?"—"Du skall bo deri
(en stämman sade), skenet dig bedrager,
i natten sitt och tänk! *när den blir slut, blir dager.*"

and to *Jacob Faxé* (1827):

Dock, när den nattliga syn, den kära, blir ute för alltid,
detta är tecknet för er; glädjens, *ty dagen är när.*

"Light," as the symbol for immortality, corresponds exactly to Tegnér's ideal as to the essential qualities of poetry—*kraft och klarhet*—which he so nobly expounded in his *Epilog* of 1820. And when death came to the poet himself, it is said²² that he demanded "light," for he could not endure the darkness ("endast mörkret ej"). Whether or not this episode recorded of Tegnér's last moments be fact or fiction,²³ the vital fact remains that "light," as the symbol of immortality, expressed the very essence of Tegnér's poetic and religious instincts.

CONCLUSION

In Tegnér's poetic portrayal of death we see now the Romantic philosopher and now the Lutheran bishop, who in

and especially *Till en yngling* (1810) where the classical Hades is portrayed:

der Cerberus skäller med trekäftadt dån
i öde rum,
och furier piska den fege ifrån
Elysium.

²² Cf. *Schück och Warburg*, "Illustrerad Svensk Litteraturhistoria," Vol. II, 2, p. 719, Stockholm, 1897.

²³ Cf., for instance, the parallel tradition related of the great German poet Goethe at his death: "Mehr Licht."

order to comfort the bereaved lends himself to the traditional conceptions of Heaven and the dead. But in either case there are revealed the characteristic features of his poetry, viz., his great love of nature and of humanity and his tendency to draw sharp contrasts in thought and color. The various phases of death are thus presented like a painted picture in which the variegated colors of nature and the sublime effect of the artist's conception of the soul are blended in a beautiful panorama.

The seeming contradictions in Tegnér's conception of death and the dead are for the most part merely metaphorical and characteristic of all poetry. Tegnér was, in fact, primarily a poet and not a philosopher, and it is mainly for this reason, I think, that his religious philosophy cannot be pieced together into any definite and logical system. When, for instance, he pictures Heaven, on the one hand, according to the orthodox conception (i.e., as an abode above the clouds where winged angels are singing about the throne of God and playing upon golden harps, etc., cf. *Nattvardsbarnen*) and, on the other hand, as a purely spiritual state of mind (cf. his elegy to *K. L. Beckfriis*), the difference lies rather in the poetic than in the philosophic conception. Tegnér's poetry in its totality reveals his fundamental conception of death as a continued existence of the soul in an idealized state of happiness; which by the poet may well be expressed²⁴ either in concrete (physical) or abstract (spiritual) terms.

It is also significant that Tegnér in his poetry rarely gives expression to the orthodox conception of Hell or eternal punishment. Both his artistic sense and his idealistic philosophy naturally rejected a conception which is at once ugly and inconsistent with the poet's purpose. Wherever the ugly appears (such as in the portrayal of the physical aspects of the grave), it is so contrasted and blended with the beautiful (i.e., the conception of the spirit life) that the total effect is never marred. His religious philosophy too was constructive

²⁴ Here we are again reminded of Tegnér's own admonition regarding poetry and life,—“tecknet är ej saken.”

and therefore the poet naturally emphasized the positive elements of religion such as faith, hope, life, etc., to which the conception of Hell is alien.

Together with his conception of death, however, there is inextricably woven the poet's philosophy of life, which views death in its supreme significance to the living. Death pronounces judgment upon the living;²⁵ death means *life*, not life as we have lived it here in its fragmentary and unsatisfactory form, but life in its fullest and richest sense, viz., the progress upward toward the Infinite of whom we are a part. The spirit is the "essential" thing for which man should strive, and death reveals the tremendous significance of this fact to the living:

Hvad tillfälligt är må falla;
det väsentliga består.

The poet's moral perception and religious instinct thus find expression in portraying a phenomenon which still remains the great mystery to humanity, but a mystery which in no wise vitiates the truth of those principles of life which the poet has laid down as the only sane and wholesome way to regard death. If he has not answered the question of death, Tegnér has, nevertheless, answered the question of life, at least insofar as he has thru his poetry made a most powerful appeal to the highest instincts in man.

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²⁵ Cf. especially the noble sentiments uttered in *Efter talets slut vid Vexjö gymnasii jubelfest* (1843):

Den, som föds, skall dö,
och lycklig den, som lemnar qvar ett minne,
om icke af det stora, som han gjort,
dock af det ädla, som han sökt och velat!

or in his elegy to *Anna B. Leijonhufvud*:

Dock—mycket är af grafvarna att lära,
af deras helst, som hvila der i ära,
ty allt hvad menskan här sitt värde gaf,
förspridt i lifvet, samlas på dess graf.

or in his elegy to *Vilhelmina U. Cedercrans*:

Döden är lifvets kontroll; gå hän och se hur hon lefvat!
blommar ett paradiset ej rundt kring den saligas graf?